Chapter 9

Working With
an Evaluator

Once projects have selected an evaluation consultant, the next step is to develop a formal agreement for evaluation services. This chapter covers:

- basic elements of an evaluation agreement;
- developing a Scope of Work; and
- the evaluator–staff relationship.

Basic Elements of an Evaluation Agreement

It is common practice to develop an agreement that covers a project year or phase of the evaluation and to update agreements as needed in later years. Even Start projects that use a contract vehicle to retain an independent evaluator should check the federal procurement standards applicable to their organization based on the Education Department Administrative Legislation Regulations (EDGAR).[6]

Agreements for independent evaluation services often include these elements:

- a scope of work that summarizes the evaluation tasks that the evaluator has agreed to perform and a timeline for completing tasks and deliverables;
- a list of deliverables or expected products e.g., instruments, formal reports, with due dates for completion;
- a list of products or services that the project will provide the evaluator, e.g., test records, attendance files, scheduling parent focus groups;
- a statement of mutual understanding about the confidentiality of records and reports, including restrictions on publishing articles or reports about the project;
- procedures for handling disputes;
- billing procedures and a schedule of payments; and
- a process for amending the agreement.

Developing a Scope of Work

The heart of the evaluation agreement, the Scope of Work specifies all the tasks and functions that the evaluator is expected to perform. The more clearly defined the Scope of Work, the higher the likelihood that the desired tasks will be completed and that expectations for the evaluation will be met. The sample Scope of Work on page 86 lists key evaluation

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[6] For more information on the applicable federal procurement standards in the Education Department General Administration Regulations, see EDGAR, Sections 74.40 – 74.48 (34 C.F.R. sections 74.40 - 74.48) for institutions of higher education and non-profit organizations and Section 80.36 (34 C.F.R. section 80.36) for state governments such as state educational agencies, local governments, such as local educational agencies, and Indian tribes and tribal organizations. EDGAR is available at: http://www.ed.gov/policy/fund/reg/edgarReg/edgar.html.

tasks that could be included in a comprehensive Even Start local evaluation. Some tasks are broken down to show more detailed examples of potential services, products, or activities.

For each key evaluation task, the Scope of Work estimates the time required to complete the task. These estimates are described in terms of days; the evaluator's daily rate may determine the actual cost for each service or product. Although evaluator rates are likely to vary widely by state and city, the daily rates of experienced evaluators may be about $500/day. Project staff should confer with their state coordinator or other Even Start programs about reasonable daily rates for evaluator services in their area.

Remember that if evaluators join the project as independent consultants, their daily rates will likely include all overhead-related costs (e.g., office rental, office equipment, secretarial, printing, telephone, payroll taxes, and liability insurance). Travel expenses are often not included in an evaluator's daily rate, and if an evaluator is required to travel considerable distances to the project or attend required state or federal required meetings, this expense may be an added negotiated cost (to the extent allowable).

The actual number of days needed to complete tasks is subject to discussion and negotiation with the independent evaluator. It is important to note that the number of days suggested in the sample Scope of Work are "time estimates." The actual tasks in a project's Scope of Work may require less or more time. It is also important to remember that the "total number of days" in a Scope of Work generally represents 1) the days that the evaluator works on-site (e.g., conducting site visits, interviewing parents, participating in staff meetings), 2) days he or she works off-site (e.g., analyzing data, writing reports), and 3) days the evaluator attends required state and/or federal trainings. For example, it would not be unusual for an evaluation agreement of 30 days to include 12 days of on-site time, 17 days of off-site time, and one day for a required training.

The following Scope of Work, provided solely as a resource, incorporates the key evaluation tasks proposed in each section of the *Guide's* evaluation framework (Chapters 3 through 7). Conducting a comprehensive local evaluation designed to yield useful information for staff and other stakeholders requires the allocation of sufficient resources. Projects that choose to implement the recommendations outlined in this *Guide* may need to consider budgeting between $10,000 - $15,000/year for their local evaluation.

Sample Scope of Work for a Comprehensive Evaluation of an Even Start Program (Includes approximate number/range of days for completing each task)	
Tasks/Activities/Products	**Days** **@ $500/day**

1. Develop an evaluation design and management plan
    a. Review state evaluation requirements, performance indicators, and other ES statutory requirements
    b. Meet with staff and other stakeholders to identify participant outcomes, evaluation focus, and key evaluation questions
    c. Select and/or identify assessment instruments
    d. Develop a data collection plan
    e. Develop a timeline and management plan for conducting study
	3-4 days

2. Train staff in administering, scoring, and interpreting selected instruments	1-2 days

3. Develop forms, interview protocols, and questionnaires
    a. Consent form, attendance, and program intensity forms
    b. Interviews/questionnaires for parents, collaborators, staff
	2-3 days

4. Conduct interviews/administer surveys	1-3 days

5. Develop spreadsheets and train staff in data input
    a. Develop attendance spreadsheet
    b. Monitor data input
	1 - 2 days

6. Aggregate/analyze outcome data and findings from evaluation questions
    a. Monitor pre-test/post-test data collection
    b. Tabulate survey/interview/milestone data
    c. Conduct content and statistical analyses of data
	2-4 days

7. Assist in fulfilling state requirements for program quality review
    a. Develop staff questionnaires/facilitate self study discussions
    b. Analyze findings/summarize findings
	1-3 days

8. Monitor project development/implementation
    a. Conduct site visits to observe key program activities
    b. Attend staff meetings
	3-5 days

9. Write evaluation reports and recommendations for improvement a. Write executive summary and technical report	4 - 6 days

10. Communicate findings to a variety of audiences
    a. Develop PowerPoint presentation
    b. Review findings with staff, collaborators, and administrators
	1-2 days

11. Attend state conferences and federal meetings – required to achieve above job responsibilities and activities	1-2 days
The estimated costs provided in the Sample Scope of Work are based on the fewest and greatest number of days. Travel expenses are not included in the following calculations. Range: 20 days @ $500/day = $10,000 35 days @ $500/day = $17,500	

Note: The sample Scope of Work does not specify a timeline for deliverables. Optimally, a project's final Scope of Work would include a timeline for tasks and deliverables that would reflect state expectations and other Even Start requirements.

Services or activities that are typically not included in a Scope of Work for an independent evaluator include:

- developing outcome instruments (which can be very time- and labor-intensive);
- administering individual or group tests, unless special arrangements have been made;
- conducting personnel evaluations, or using program data for personnel evaluation;
- writing grants; and
- serving as the liaison or primary communication link with the state coordinator.

Establishing costs. As stated, the cost of an evaluation may be pre-specified or it may be a matter of determining the number of evaluator days that are needed to perform the evaluation tasks included in the Scope of Work. When estimating the number of evaluator days, keep the following factors in mind:

- the scope and complexity of the task (e.g., developing an attendance form may be less complex than a parent questionnaire);
- whether the evaluator is providing advice or actually performing the task (e.g., advising on a self study process vs. conducting self study focus groups);
- the number of staff meetings that the evaluator will attend and/or the number of sites where he or she will observe program activities;
- the expense of buying a database or the evaluator's time to develop one, both of which may add considerable cost to the evaluation budget; and
- data collection costs, which will vary depending on the size of the sample and the labor intensity associated with different methodologies.

Projects may consider the following suggestions to reduce the costs of an evaluation:

- Limit the logistics work required of the evaluator. For example, do not ask the evaluator to perform recordkeeping tasks that other staff can readily complete;
- Where appropriate, delegate data collection tasks to project staff and concentrate evaluator expertise on design, analysis, and report writing tasks;
- Use data collection methods that take less labor to implement and analyze. Individual interviews, for example, require more time than paper-and-pencil surveys;
- Prioritize evaluation questions. Select a few for in-depth evaluation each year rather than expecting "full" evaluation coverage of all parts of the program; and
- Use the evaluator for evaluation tasks rather than general program support. Consider carefully any "extras" requests of the evaluator, such as attending staff meetings or accompanying staff to meetings with collaborators.

The Evaluator–Staff Relationship

Orienting evaluators and program staff. Once the project has secured the services of an evaluator, it is wise to schedule an orientation to the Even Start program for all members of the evaluation team. This orientation would generally include meeting members of the staff, observing typical instructional activities and classes, and providing information about key program features and issues. It is helpful to share all types of materials and records, including the program proposal, attendance recording forms, results/recommendations from previous evaluations, and information about evaluation requirements. Information that helps the evaluator understand the program and participants will ensure that he or she does not waste time seeking information that is already available.

The purpose of this orientation is to share information about the program and begin to establish a good working relationship between the evaluators and staff. It is best to keep the orientation informal, for an easy exchange of ideas and suggestions. The next step would be to schedule a more formal meeting with staff and collaborating agencies to begin crafting the evaluation plan. (See Chapter 10.)

Establish regular opportunities to communicate. The strength of the evaluator—staff relationship depends on ongoing and clear communication. That communication will be facilitated by designating a project contact person who will take responsibility for initiating contacts with the evaluator, fielding questions and requests, and conveying information to others.

The intense level of communication that occurs during the design of the evaluation plan needs to be followed with check-in discussions as the evaluator carries out the tasks in the Scope of Work. Regularly scheduled communications such as monthly phone calls or email updates will help alert the evaluator to changes in program operations and let the evaluator share information emerging from his or her activities. It is generally a good idea to have some monthly contact to review accomplishments, discuss upcoming evaluation activities, and adjust the original plan as needed.

Reasonable expectations for a productive working relationship. Working with an evaluation consultant is not that different from working with any other staff member in an organization. The same rules and expectations that govern all collegial relationships apply. From this perspective, it is reasonable to expect that the evaluator will:

- follow through on the evaluation agreement;
- provide timely notification if adjustments to original plans are necessary;
- ask tough questions and challenge assumptions in a respectful manner;
- work in partnership with other staff members;
- respect participants' confidentiality; and
- make suggestions for improving the program and the evaluation.

Monitoring evaluator performance. It is the responsibility of the Even Start project director to monitor evaluator performance and ensure that evaluation tasks are completed according to schedule and at the expected level of quality. The formal agreement for services can be a tool for monitoring performance. If desired, the agreement could specify that final payment be issued after submittal of the final deliverables and a determination that the deliverables have met all state or contract requirements.

As discussed previously, evaluation is collaborative: both project staff and evaluators contribute to its success. On occasions when evaluators do not perform required tasks or provide deliverables on time, project staff members are encouraged to talk with the evaluator to determine the reasons for this lack of performance. For example, an evaluator may not be able to analyze data or write reports because the data the program provided were incomplete, in an unusable format, or late.

Sometimes project staff may disagree with the findings presented in the final evaluation report. If this occurs and cannot be resolved by communicating with the evaluator, project directors are encouraged to provide the project's perspective or explanation as an addendum to the report.

Staff members are encouraged to give regular feedback rather than wait until the end of the agreement to ask questions or express concerns about the evaluator's performance. Regularly scheduled communication can anticipate and resolve many issues before they damage the evaluation.

The success of the evaluator-staff partnership depends on teamwork and cooperation. There may be times, however, when the evaluator and/or the Even Start project decide not to renew the evaluation agreement for another year. One option to anticipate this is to include a clause in the agreement specifying that either party may terminate the agreement with 30 days notice. If the evaluator–staff relationship deteriorates and the project is faced with the decision to terminate or not renew the agreement for the next year, project staff may take solace in knowing that, as the search for a new evaluator begins, this past experience will serve as a source of valuable insight into those evaluator qualifications that best match their program.

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